

# Acton Police Department

## InterDepartmental Memo

**From:** Frank J. Widmayer, Chief of Police

**Date:** January 14, 2004

**To:** Don Johnson, Town Manager

**Subj:** Follow up question from budget meeting

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*Frank and Bob - your comments on joint dispatch with Boxboro including the pros and cons of handing part of Boxboro's dispatch to another entity. Be careful you are consistent with your previous rationale for combining Acton's dispatch.*

The question I was answering was whether the new public safety dispatch center would be able to take just part of Boxborough's 911 calls, in other words just one of either police or fire. The answer I gave was that we could because the networking of the system allows for that. It is probably confusing now that I think about it because I was only speaking to what happens with 911 calls and not the subsequent dispatch function. Under that scenario all the 911 calls would have to come to our PSF, answered by our dispatcher and transferred to whomever handles the dispatch functions for Boxborough. That could be our PSF if we were handling their police dispatch or another town such as Littleton. In a different scenario, we could transfer fire calls to Harvard if they were handling fire dispatch for Boxborough. The 911 call answering and screening is only part of the process of dispatching. That is why we are able to currently take the 911 calls for Acton Fire without additional personnel because the fire department ultimately gets the call and handles dispatch. Emergency Medical Dispatch causes a complication with medical calls however since only civilian police dispatchers are trained in that aspect.

Whether a new Acton PSF Dispatch Center could handle all aspects of fire dispatch for Boxborough I will leave to Chief Craig for response. My guess is that is likely but I defer to him and his knowledge of Boxborough Fire operations.

Whether a new Acton PSF Dispatch Center could handle all aspects of police dispatch for Boxborough is less likely. It may require additional staffing, at least on some shifts. Police call volumes are generally much higher than fire calls and cruisers are constantly on patrol stopping cars, etc. I will attach the document I submitted to you several months ago regarding some of the potential issues regarding dispatching for Boxborough.

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Frank J. Widmayer  
Chief of Police

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**From:** Frank J. Widmayer, Chief of Police

**Date:** October 29, 2003

**To:** Don Johnson, Town Manager

**Subj:** Regional Dispatch with Boxborough

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Currently the police department handles E-911 call taking for the police and fire departments. Fire and ambulance calls are transferred to the fire department and then dispatched by an on duty firefighter. Regional dispatch operations with Boxborough using the existing infrastructure would result in a fragmented system and would be basically reverting to the type of system Boxborough used in the past with both Acton Fire and Littleton Police dispatch.

In approximately 18 months the public safety facility will begin to function as a joint police and fire dispatch system. The goal at that time is to hire additional civilian dispatchers and put trained firefighters back on fire fighting equipment. Adding Boxborough dispatch at that time would be easier and more cost effective than trying to merge the operations now.

The following list of items shows the basic points that I feel should be part of the discussion with the Town of Boxborough. The Fire Chief may have other considerations that I may have missed in this memo. Further evaluation is recommended.

### **Communications**

- Radio equipment purchases may be required.
- Phone equipment will be needed for Boxborough non-emergency calls.
- Backup and redundancy considerations.
- Leaps/NCIC contract requires a person in the building at all times meaning Boxborough may lose their State/FBI/Registry links to their station.
- MDT compatibility and radio signal issues need to be researched.
- Incompatible computer systems may cause inefficiency.

### **Staffing**

- Unionized dispatch employees in Boxborough vs. non-union in Acton.
- Boxborough dispatchers on a 4&2 rotation, in Acton it is a 5&2 shift.
- Extra personnel may be required to handle Boxborough dispatch requirements.
- Route 495 in Boxborough may generate a high E-911 and cell phone call volume.

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- Training costs for multi-jurisdictional dispatchers.
- Policy considerations.
- Supervisory considerations.

### **Operational considerations**

- Walk-in traffic. Where will Boxborough citizens go for reports, paperwork, etc.?
- Will we take over permit issuance, etc. or will that be handled by their secretary or others?
- Mutual Aid agreements will have to be revisited.
- Liability considerations.
- One time costs vs. annual operational expenses should be broken out.

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Frank J. Widmayer  
Chief of Police